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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to survey undergraduates majoring in education and teachers in the field regarding reasons for becoming a teacher and to determine levels of variance in response between these two groups. In the Spring of 1994, a survey instrument containing 10 reasons for becoming a teacher was pilot tested with 110 teachers and 152 undergraduate education majors. Chi-square and bivariate correlation-regression were used to analyze the data obtained. Findings revealed that classroom teachers perceived value to society as the primary reason for being a teacher; a preference to work with children was second. For undergraduates, a preference to work with children was the prime motivator, with social value ranking third in importance. Informal interviews with the undergraduates were conducted to obtain additional insights into why these students chose to become teachers. A second set of instruments rated the results of the first instrument with specific statements gleaned from the interviews as rationales; it was administered to 96 undergraduate education majors and 74 teachers. The most common rationale given by both was an opportunity to reach the social problems of children and young adults. Distinctive disagreement was found regarding the value or significance that an educator can make to society. It was concluded that the first instrument offered results that agreed with the common literature, while the second part offered additional insight into the rationales of the first instrument. (NAV)

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NEW PERSPECTIVES REGARDING REASONS FOR BECOMING A TEACHER: A STUDY OF TEACHERS AND UNDERGRADUATES IN EDUCATION

A Paper

Presented to
The Mid-South Educational Research Association
1995 Annual Meeting
Biloxi, Mississippi
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As we near the twenty-first century, concerns are apparent with reference to teachers leaving the profession and what the future holds for students enrolled in colleges of education now preparing to enter the profession. This study addresses perspectives of these undergraduates and teachers in the field regarding possible rewards and frustrations involved in becoming a teacher in the State of Louisiana.

According to Purkey and Novak (1984), in ranked order what teachers want most are (1) intrinsic motivation, (2) recognition as an excellent teacher, (3) respect from colleagues, and (4) an opportunity to work with other professionals.

The periodic surveys by the National Education Association (NEA) regarding The status of the American public school teacher are valuable sources of data concerning working conditions and attitudes of teachers in the profession (Heyns, 1988). A 1992 survey by the National Education Association reported that teacher salary is not a motivator to do a better job of teaching. To the contrary, it was found in this longitudinal survey that (1) a desire to work with young people, and (2) value or significance made to society, rank as the top two reasons teachers remain in the profession.

In a 1991 national survey for Metropolitan Life, it was found that the three main factors causing teachers to leave the profession were (1) students' social problems, (2) need or want to earn more money, and (3) lack of support from the administration (Harris and Associates, 1991).

As reported by the Associated Press in September, 1994; Louisiana ranks last among the fifty states, including the Dis-

trict of Columbia, with a high school graduation rate of 56%; the national graduation rate was 71% last year (The American Legislative Exchange Council, 1994)

Findings from another study by The Louisiana Education Policy Research Center, which have recently been publicized by the Associated Press, indicate that after two years, only about one-half of new teachers in Louisiana public schools remain in the district that initially hired them, and fewer than two-thirds are teaching in any public school of the State's 64 parish school systems. Additional findings pinpointed student discipline problems as the primary reason that new teachers left their schools, and that this problem nationwide is more acute in the state of Louisiana. Also, average teacher salaries in Louisiana currently rank 48th. in the nation (Frantz, 1994). While the frustrations of teaching are apparent, this study found new perspectives for becoming a teacher.

Purposes of the Study

The purposes of this study were to (1) survey undergraduates currently majoring in education and teachers in the field regarding reasons for becoming a teacher, and (2) to determine levels of variance in response between perspectives of these two groups.

Methodology

During the Spring Semester of 1994, an instrument was constructed, listing at random, ten reasons appearing prominently in the literature for becoming a teacher. In order to establish an acceptable degree of validity, the instrument was piloted with two small groups of teachers and undergraduates. One hundred ten teachers and one hundred fifty-two undergraduates majoring in

education during the 1994 Spring and Fall Semesters were then requested to rate each item according to a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from "highest priority" to "lowest priority". Two methods for determining variance, chi-square and bivariate correlation-regression, were used to analyze the data.

Results of the Study

The teachers (110) in the classroom perceived "the value or significance an educator can make to society" as 4.2 on the five-point rating scale, and the utmost reason for being a teacher.

CHART A

TEACHERS (110): QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

REASONS WHY I AM A TEACHER

A	B	C	D	E
(5) highest priority	(4) high priority	(3) moderate priority	(2) low priority	(1) lowest priority

RANK

(1) The value or significance an educator can make to society
A B C D E
4.2

(2) A preference to work with children or young adults
A B C D E
4.16

(3) Being among other professionals in an academic environment
A B C D E
3.74

(7) Opportunities for professional development and advancement
A B C D E
3.65

(6) Interest in subject-matter field
A B C D E
3.61

(9) Respect from colleagues
A B C D E
3.60

(10) Academic freedom in decision-making
A B C D E
3.58

(8) Possibility for recognition as "an excellent teacher"
A B C D E
3.36

(5) Intrinsic motivation derived from students' accomplishments
A B C D E
3.27

(4) Financial benefits
A B C D E
2.54

"A preference to work with children or young adults" was rated second as 4.16, and "being among other professionals in an academic environment" appeared as the third consideration with a rating of 3.74. (Chart A)

The undergraduates (152) majoring in education felt that "a preference to work with children or young adults" was the main reason for becoming a teacher, and rated this item 4.68.

CHART B

UNDERGRADUATES (152): QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

REASONS WHY I WANT TO BECOME A TEACHER

A	B	C	D	E
(5) highest priority	(4) high priority	(3) moderate priority	(2) low priority	(1) lowest priority

RANK

(2) A preference to work with children or young adults
4.68

(5) Intrinsic motivation derived from students' accomplishments
4.59

(1) The value or significance an educator can make to society
4.5

(6) Interest in subject-matter field
4.11

(10) Academic freedom in decision-making
4.03

(9) Respect from colleagues
3.72

(3) Being among other professionals in an academic environment
3.68

(8) Possibility for recognition as "an excellent teacher"
3.63

(7) Opportunities for professional development and advancement
3.61

(4) Financial benefits
2.63

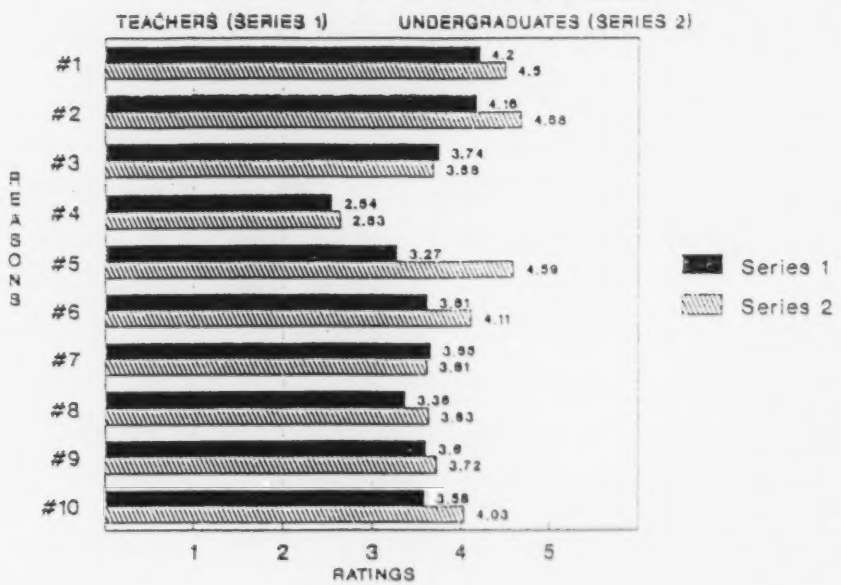
"Intrinsic motivation derived from students' accomplishments" was

rated second as 4.59, and "the value or significance an educator can make to society" ranked third with 4.5. (Chart B)

In comparison, teachers in the field listed "the value or significance an educator can make to society" as the prime reason for becoming a teacher; undergraduates rated this third. Teachers rated "a preference to work with children or young adults" second; the undergraduates listed this first. One of the widest variances appeared with the teachers rating third "being among other professionals in an academic environment"; the undergraduates rated this seventh. Both of the groups rated possible "financial benefits" tenth as is supported by the literature. (Chart C)

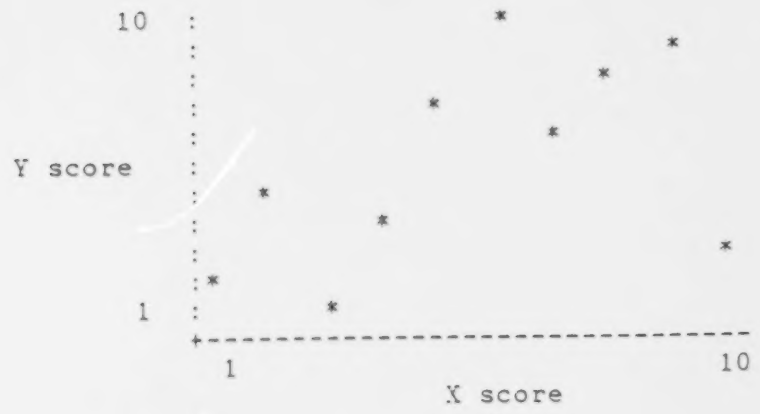
CHART C

A COMPARISON OF RATINGS PER REASON



In essence, the perspectives of the two groups were similar in the rating of four reasons, but differed in the rating of

three reasons for becoming a teacher. Correlation between the responses of the teachers in the field and undergraduates was not significant at either the .01 or .05 levels.



Informal interviews, with the undergraduate respondents participating in the study, provided additional insight regarding new perspectives for becoming a teacher. Of particular interest concerned perceptions of the undergraduates with reference to "a preference to work with children or young adults". A common feeling was that opportunities exist to ease some of the social problems in the schools of the future. Also congruent with findings of recent Gallup Polls, a number of the undergraduates felt that teachers are presently gaining more respect from the community than in the recent past. Many of the undergraduates interviewed elaborated on intrinsic motivation and "the value or significance an educator can make to society" as reasons for becoming a teacher.

Beginning with the onset of the 1995 Spring Semester, and continuing through the 1995 Fall Semester, a more indepth obser-

vation was made regarding "reasons for becoming a teacher" in a second phase of the study. A second set of instruments was constructed; one for teachers in the field and one for undergraduates majoring in education. Each instrument contained a list of the five highest-ranked reasons for becoming a teacher as previously perceived by each group in the first phase of the study, with specific statements gleaned from the interviews as rationales. (Charts D and E)

CHART D

TEACHERS (74): RATIONALE STATEMENTS

QUESTIONNAIRE: REGARDING REASONS WHY I AM A TEACHER

In a recent survey of experienced teachers the following 5 reasons for teaching were ranked highest. Below each of the following reasons, circle the letter which in your opinion, most closely corresponds.

(1) THE VALUE OR SIGNIFICANCE AN EDUCATOR CAN MAKE TO SOCIETY

54% a. Teachers are responsible for the accomplishments of future generations.

b. Education is the solution to solving the problems of society.

(2) A PREFERENCE TO WORK WITH CHILDREN OR YOUNG ADULTS

62% a. Opportunities still exist to ease some of the social problems of children and young adults.

b. Students in a learning environment today are more open to innovative ideas.

(3) BEING AMONG OTHER PROFESSIONALS IN AN ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT

68% a. Teaching is a profession in which a person can obtain knowledge and experience, pride and self-esteem.

b. A "quality school" can be a place of significant accomplishments.

(4) OPPORTUNITY FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND ADVANCEMENT

a. Opportunities are present for securing positions of great responsibility.

b. The teaching profession has a wide diversity of interests in which to pursue an area of expertise.

(5) INTEREST IN SUBJECT MATTER

a. Advancement of knowledge in an exciting field is rapidly gaining momentum.

57% b. Many opportunities exist for dedicated professionals in a particular area of academic interest.

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CHART E

UNDERGRADUATES (96): RATIONALE STATEMENTS

QUESTIONNAIRE: REGARDING REASONS WHY I WANT TO BE A TEACHER

In a recent survey of students preparing to become teachers, the following 5 reasons for becoming a teacher were ranked highest. Below each of the following reasons, circle the letter which in your opinion, most closely corresponds.

(1) A PREFERENCE TO WORK WITH CHILDREN OR YOUNG ADULTS

69% a. Opportunities still exist to ease some of the social problems of children and young adults.

b. Students in a learning environment today are more open to innovative ideas.

(2) INTRINSIC MOTIVATION DERIVED FROM STUDENTS' ACCOMPLISHMENTS

a. Inspiration is strongly correlated with student achievement.

b. The opportunity to assist in one's acquisition of knowledge and skill is a privilege.

(3) THE VALUE OR SIGNIFICANCE AN EDUCATOR CAN MAKE TO SOCIETY

a. Teachers are responsible for the accomplishments of future generations

65% b. Education is the solution to solving the problems of society.

(4) INTEREST IN SUBJECT MATTER

a. Advancement of knowledge in an exciting field is rapidly gaining momentum.

76% b. Many opportunities exist for dedicated professionals in a particular area of academic interest.

(5) ACADEMIC FREEDOM IN DECISION-MAKING

a. Teachers make professional decisions regarding curriculum and methodology.

92% b. Through teaching, opportunities exist to guide students in their academic endeavors.

This set of instruments was administered to 74 teachers and 96 undergraduates majoring in education. The teachers had previously ranked "a preference to work with children or young adults" as the second highest reason for teaching. The undergraduates had ranked this reason first. As a rationale, the statement nearest consensus was "Opportunities still exist to ease some of the social problems of children and young adults". Sixty-two percent (46) of the teachers and 69% (66) of the undergraduates

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supported this statement.

In the responses concerning an "interest in subject matter", 57% (42) of the teachers and 76% (73) of the undergraduates selected the rationale "Many opportunities exist for dedicated professionals in a particular area of academic interest".

Distinctive disagreement occurred between the teachers and undergraduates with regard to "value or significance an educator can make to society". The teachers in the first part of the study had previously ranked this reason first, and the undergraduates had ranked it third. Fifty-four percent (40) of the teachers selected the statement "Teachers are responsible for the accomplishments of future generations", while 65% (62) of the undergraduates selected the statement "Education is the solution to solving the problems of society".

Concerning "academic freedom in decision-making", 92% (88) of the undergraduates chose the statement "Through teaching, opportunities exist to guide students in their academic endeavors". The teachers in the field did not rank this item as one of the top five reasons for becoming a teacher.

In conclusion, the first part of this study produced results that were statistically in agreement with the literature. Of specific consensus were the primary two reasons teachers remain in the profession as revealed in the 1992 survey of teachers by the National Education Association.

The second phase of this study provided additional insight concerning rationales as perceived by teachers in the field and undergraduates majoring in education. The two groups of respondents also congruently perceived "a preference to work with

children or young adults" and "the value or significance an educator can make to society" as prime reasons for becoming a teacher. Teachers in the field were prone to recognize "Teaching as a profession in which a person can obtain knowledge, successful experience, pride, and self-esteem.

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